

The History Samuel Adam Merrill

by a Daughter

Frequently we live as children in the home having daily contact with our parents without ever coming to realize that they are among the great spirits of the earth. Perhaps living so close to them we see only little frailties of human nature and miss the grandeur and greatness of their characters and noble lives.

I know that our Father was among the noble ones in the spirit world, chosen to come to earth through noble parentage to bear the priesthood and assume the responsibility of acting as our guardian, provider, instructor and exemplar. As I grow older, I realize the sacrifices he made for the truth and his unselfish and loving service for us.

I think he followed the advice of Paul to Timothy "follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." He was a good man.

The first of his ancestors to come to America was Nathaniel Merrill, who came before 1635 because his son was born in Newbury, Massachusetts in 1635. His grandfather was Samuel Merrill who was born September 28, 1778. He spent his early life in the state of New York where he married Phoebe Odell and had a family of 12 children. His son and fifth child — Samuel Bemus Merrill is my father's father. He was born at Smithfield, New York on January 4, 1812.

Father's Mother, Elizabeth Runyon, was born at Greenwich, New Jersey. Father, Samuel Adam Merrill, was the third child and oldest son. He was born April 12, 1846 in Springfield, Illinois. His parents were in Nauvoo when the body of the prophet was brought back from Carthage. Both looked upon the martyred prophet, in the beautiful city which had grown up under his guiding hand.

He often said, in a joking way, that he could remember when he crossed the Mississippi River. He was only two weeks old. He had heard it talked of so much in his childhood that it seemed that he actually remembered it. These ancestors joined the church in its infancy. They knew the voice of the shepherd when they hear it. I think not one of them was ever disloyal. They accepted Joseph as the Prophet of the Lord and did what they could to build of the Kingdom of God on the earth. Great Grandfather was one of those "forgotten pioneers," the Mormon Battalion coming into the valley on July 29, 1847.

He must have been quite an old man, nearing seventy, when they began the trip across the plains, because they had had all their family. In fact, most of them were married. One of his sons, Philemon Merrill, was captain of a company of the saints. Great grandfather spent the remainder of his life in Salt Lake City; dying at the old homestead on September 28, 1878 two days after Father and Mother were married and had visited him. He wasn't well at the time but got up out of bed to visit with them. He was bright and keen in his mind even at one hundred years of age. He had always called my Father Sammie, which he did at this time and asked him about his plans for the future.

Samuel Adam had two brothers and four sisters: Cynthia Ann, Elthura Elizabeth, Sarah, and Princetta. The two brothers were Teancum and Orrin Jackson.

The family of Grandfather Samuel Bemus Merrill came to the valley in 1850. They lived for ten years on the banks of the Mill Creek. The family of Grandfather Samuel B. Merrill moved in 1860 to Smithfield in Cache Valley where my father was a minuteman when he was only 16 years old. He often told us about being called as reinforcements at the Battle of Battle Creek. When they got there from

Smithfield the battle was over but he saw all the horror of a battlefield. The hillsides were strewn with the dead and the dying. The Indians had used their women as bulwarks thinking that white men wouldn't kill the women but when the commander saw what they were doing, shooting from behind the squaws, he ordered that they shoot them all. A number of papooses were left without mother or father. Some of them were taken into the homes of the settlers and kept all their lives. There were even papooses lying dead on the battlefield. The loss of white men was heavy too.

Father also spent some time in the service during the Black Hawk War. Father came to the Valley when he was about six years old. What schooling he had, he got in the valley schools. He was a good penman and an incessant reader. He encouraged us all to read. Whenever he had a chance he bought us a book and the long winter evenings on the farm were spent reading. I remember one book called Easy Steps for Little Feet which was the Bible told in simple language. It was about 2 1/2 or 3 inches thick. We went through it many times. Also he read to us from the Bible.

In my childhood there was a traveling library. The books were left at the store for a few weeks or a month to be loaned out, and I read a lot of those. I remember A Tale of Two Cities, East Lynn, Fred's Dark Days, and many more. I was the baby girl, he would take me on his lap and read to us all while mother knitted or sewed. I can still hear the click of the knitting needles as they simply flew around the stocking or cap or mitten that she was doing. She knit all our stockings for winter and for a family of us that was quite a task. How they did make our legs itch when we had to put them on in the fall.

I remember one winter evening when father was reading to us and a loud knock came on the door. Father called, "Come in," never thinking that there would be anyone other than a neighbor coming out that kind of night. The door opened and a great big bearded man stepped into the room. It was snowing and the snow and wind came in with him. Mother jumped to her feet and I remember how glad I was for the protecting arms of my father around me. He was what we called a tramp, and was wanting a place to sleep. Mother gave him a quilt and Father told him to go out to the barn and sleep in the hay, which he did. The next morning he was fed and went on his way.

Father would never let anyone be turned away without food. Sometimes the tramps would chop a little wood or hoe a few rows of garden for their meals, but most often they were given some thick sandwiches and sent on their way. Mother often said that the tramps had a mark on our gatepost because it seemed like every one of them stopped.

Father often sang to us in the evening. He had a good voice. Over and over he sang the ballads of pioneer days: "I Wandered to the Village Tom," "Sweet Betsy," "Up in a Balloon Boys," and many others. His boyhood days were spent as the days of most pioneer boys, working hard and having amusement that they arranged for themselves. Father played baseball and often told us how he liked to play. I can remember seeing him play. He had two fingers that were bent at the first joint. He said playing baseball had made them that way. They caught the ball without any mitts or gloves in those days. I was among the last of his children so he must have been nearing 60 years of age when I last saw him play.

He was a large man, about six feet two inches tall with black wavy hair and the kindest brown eyes. He was truly a gentleman. His youth and early manhood were spent in the rough pioneer times but he always had a dignity and culture about him. When he was 19 years old he was called to go to Winter Quarters to get some English emigrants. There was a captain over the company and a captain over each ten wagons. I don't know how many but there was a large company of them. Each one furnished their own outfit. They picked up their train of immigrants; amongst them was an English family by the name of Noble. One member of the family was a

lovely young girl about his age called Leanora. A courtship began which resulted in their marriage, on the 3rd of February in 1865.

After they had reached the valley, the Nobel family moved to Smithfield, Utah where. Samuel's family already lived. Six children were born to Samuel and Leanora: Mary Elizabeth, Samuel Teancum, Adelbert Owen, Acquilla and Priscilla, who were twins, and Laura Matilda. The mother, Leanora, passed away when the last little girl was born. The little motherless children were sent to live with relatives and the young husband bore his grief as best he could. The baby lived only about a year.

In two years he had found my mother, Alvira Elizabeth Tidwell, to mother his children and to be his companion and helpmate for the rest of his life, and she never failed him. They were married September 26, 1878.

He was such a kind and gentle man. Lizzie, as we always called Mary Elizabeth, has told me about father coming from his work to carry her to a children's party when her ankle was sprained and she couldn't walk.

They had a home in Smithfield. It was a pioneer home, but before their first baby, Peter Ernest, was born, a large sunny room was built onto it. Mother has often said how she appreciated it. She has often told us about the trundle beds they had that they pushed back under the big beds in the daytime. It was quite a family for a bride to take care of. The day they came back from Salt Lake where they were married in the Endowment House, the children came home. The twins were carrying their high chairs upside down on their heads. The boys Sam and Dell were there, too. Mary Elizabeth who was living in Ogden with Aunt Laura Fishburn came a while later.

I can never remember father slapping or spanking on of us in his life. He switched me around the legs one day with a wheat grass when I wouldn't mind him. I don't believe we ever disobeyed him. Father did freighting for a few years from Corinne, Utah to Helena and Butte, Montana. He had often told us of some of those experiences.

Once he was asked to take some Chinamen and their belongings to Butte. Everyone told him not to go and that he would never return alive, but he said he figured that if he treated them right, they would not hurt him. When they finally got everything together that they were to take, there were 20 wagons and about 50 Chinamen. The wagons were attached together in a chain and he drove several, I think, ten teams of mules. He said the last wagon came loose on one of the hills and went and went rolling back down the hill. There was such a chattering and confusion by the time he got back to them. He thought now they would probably mob him but they didn't and he soon had it up to the top of the hill and attached to the other again, and they went cheerfully on their way. He said they used to fight among themselves with knives but no one ever molested him, and they never did kill each other. They often invited him to eat with them but when he saw what they cooked he made some excuse to eat his own food. He finally returned to his family safe and sound and with his pockets bulging with money. They had been real generous in paying him.

Father went to Oxford, Idaho and had a farm for a few years. Ruby was born there and also Mabel. Then he went to Cub River Canyon where his Brother Orrin already lived. He had an interest in a sawmill there and worked with Calyboun Moorhead. He built a nice little sort of a cape cod cottage for his family and here I was born, also Demar and Orrin. Leslie was born in a house near the sawmill. His life was one of hard work always hewing timber, building the homes and roads and bridges and canals, doing the work of pioneering in different areas of the west. His life is really a story of the west. Some members of the family, his father's brothers, went to Arizona where their descendants still live. His sons Sam and Dell were married. They married sisters Hannah and Mary Baird. Sam was married on January 9, 1895 and Dell on March 18, 1901. Acquilla or Quill as we always called him had been married on September 9, 1898 to Nellie Nibley and Mary Elizabeth was married to Joseph Kay on February 2, 1898 and Priscilla to Frank Taylor

on January 9, 1891. Sam and Dell had taken up some farms near Swan Lake, Idaho. Mary Elizabeth lived on a farm there too. It was not long until Father decided to buy a farm a few miles from them. How well I remember the move from Cub River to Swan Lake. I was real young, but I still remember it so vividly. We moved in covered sleighs. It was early in March so we would be settled before time for the farm work to begin.

I remember how very ill it made Mother to ride inside the covered sleigh. She would ride with the driver until she was too cold then come back with us. We lived about three miles north of Swan Lake near Red Rock. Sam and Hannah had had most of their family, six sons, while living on the farm at Swan Lake.

The two last sons, twins, were born in Preston after they had moved there where Sam and Dell had a produce business. One little twin died at birth but Fred lived and was strong and healthy. Hannah's health was broken after the twins were born. She passed away when Fred was six months old. Mother and Father took the little baby bringing him home after the funeral. How thrilled we were as children to have a baby again. Mother had lost her youngest child who was also named Fred. I'm sure the little fellow filled a spot in her heart that had been so empty and the family all adored him. Fred always lived with us as a regular member of the family.

Although Father didn't go to church very often himself, he made sure everything was done up and the team hitched to the buggy in time for every one else to go. We attended the Grant Ward. Sacrament meeting was at 2:30. We went early to Sunday School and stayed till after Sacrament meeting and then the members of the family that were in the surrounding area came to our home for dinner. Here we learned the lesson of life: To work, to meet disappointment, to also honor our word. My father's motto was "A man's word should be as good as his bond." He had a standard of honesty that one doesn't often see. I think he could have born the nickname "Honest Sam" as Abraham Lincoln did "Honest Abe."

Our parents made our lives in those childhood days so good that everyone of us have loved farm life. We look back on those days with respect and honor for our parents. Father saw to it that "Old Pal" was always hitched to the one horse buggy in time to get us to school, three miles distant, on time. When we rode Pal and Topsy, he saw that the saddles were on them and we were off on time. He served as a trustee on the school board for a number of years. The bishop of the ward was our nearest neighbor. Father was always loyal and true to him.

His love for his wives and children was boundless. I'm sure he always prayed and worked that his children would be true to the Father in Heaven, true to their fellowmen, true to each other, and true to the honesty and integrity for which he stood. I'm sure he never betrayed a trust that was placed in him. His neighbors not only respected him, they loved him.

One tragedy in our family that aged my parents especially was the death of my brother Acquilla. He was in the prime of his life. He and his family were living at Pocatello where he was a mechanic in the Round House, where the trains came for service and repairs. His leg was so badly injured in an accident in the yards that it had to be amputated. In fact, it was nearly amputated at the time of the accident. He was taken to Salt Lake City to the hospital, St. Marks, where he was operated on two or three times to try to stop the spread of gangrene as infection was then called but his life couldn't be saved. In those days they didn't give blood transfusions or antibiotics as they do now. He had lost so much blood at the time of the accident that he couldn't recover. He passed away on October 18, 1902. He left a wife and two children.

We lived near Swan Lake in Grant Ward until 1908. Father had "taken up" a dry farm a few miles from the irrigated farm which he farmed for a number of years. He then decided to move to Preston where there was an academy, the Oneida Stake Academy. There

were still the younger members of the family to go to high school and college if possible. So the farm was traded for a home in town on West Oneida Street. It was a nice three-bedroom home with a nice yard and a barn and garden. We all enjoyed it. It was the nicest home my mother had had for many years.

Father spent a lot of time back at Swan Lake on the farm he still had there. Mother went back and forth with him. All the traveling was done in a white top buggy. He had a chance to sell the farm, which he did, to a neighbor who was apparently a successful young man. He however had plunged too much and took bankruptcy right afterwards so the savings of a lifetime were gone.

The children were grown except Fred and Helen so we managed. I taught school, Bertha worked in the bank, which she had done since moving to Preston. Leslie went on a mission. Demar and Orrin went to Oneida Academy and worked at first one thing and then another. Fred and Helen were still in grade school. We always had a cow or two on the pasture behind the barn. Those were happy times even if there were hard times. Father was getting old. One of the sad things of life is to see ones parents get old. He never did seem old to me, though. He always moved quickly and kept his interest in what was going on in all of us.

Gradually we were all married. He would spend part of each day with Sam and Dell at their place of business. One day a car of coal came in and there was no one to unload it. Father said he would do it. The boys protested but he insisted so they let him start. He didn't get it finished when he was struck by a sever pain in his chest. The doctors said it was an enlargement of the aorta. He was never well again. This happened in the fall, in October. He passed away at noon on new Years Day 1922, being nearly 76 years old.

His love was like a shelter around us
A guardian there to bless
The children and the hearth of home
In strength of tenderness.

We can never fully pay our debt of gratitude to our father. I can truly say that I never heard him speak ill of anyone. We were never allowed to talk and gossip about anyone. He could not bear to hear a story that was in the least shady. I have seen him leave the room rather than to listen to any such thing. He lived in pioneer times when men were rough and many were uncouth, but he never profaned nor shouted. He was dignified and kind and gentle. In my whole life, I never heard him say a swear word. Such were the lessons he tried to teach us. Hardly ever by preaching, but always by example. I have spoken of his honesty. As I have grown older, I have found that few men have his high standard of honesty.

Surely his posterity down through the generations should emulate these wonderful traits of character. He had a gentle and loving heart. He was kind to everything, even the creatures of the earth and to his wives and family. In his youth he fought as a patriot. He had deep religious convictions. His parents had the courage to join an unpopular faith and endured the bitter persecution. He had a testimony of the gospel and wanted his family to understand it and live it and serve it.

"History of Samuel Adam Merrill," found online at familysearch.org, 17 Feb 2016.